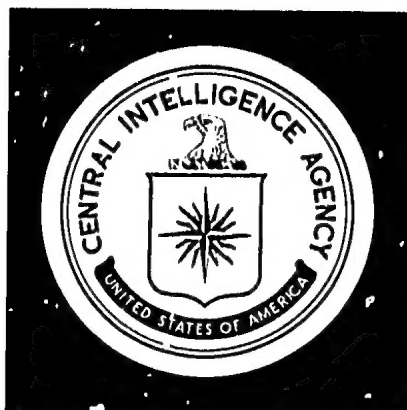


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*Pacification in South Vietnam:
A Preliminary Damage Assessment*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
25 April 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Pacification in South Vietnam:
A Preliminary Damage Assessment

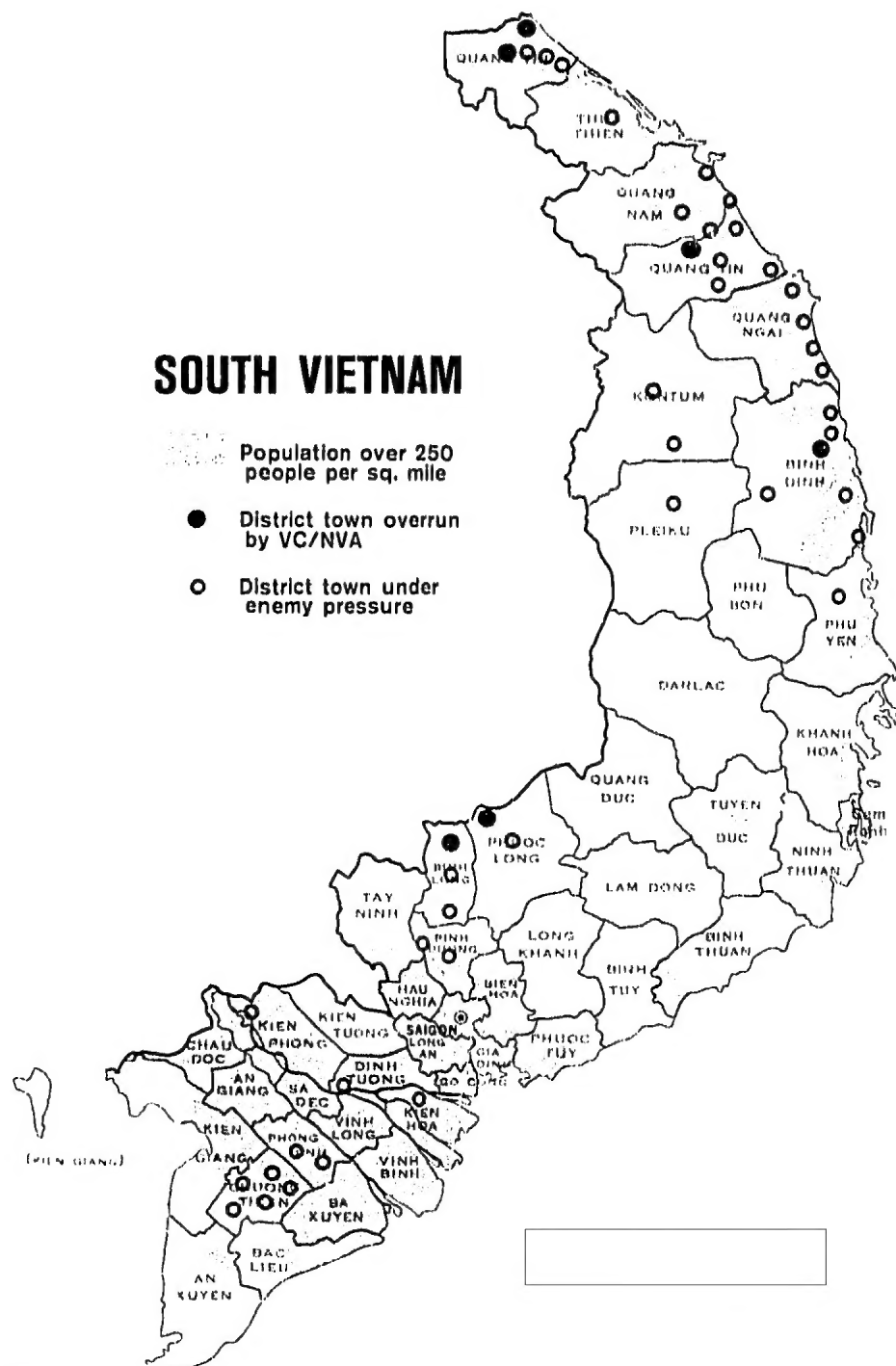
1. When the Vietnamese Communists mounted the Tet Offensive in 1968, government forces quickly pulled back into defensive positions in the principal towns, largely abandoning the countryside. It was widely feared that the pacification program had been dealt a severe and lasting setback. The Communists were unable to sustain their offensive beyond several months, however, and when their weakened units withdrew into the hills, Saigon was able to extend its influence among the population beyond what it had been before. This precedent demonstrates the hazard of drawing early conclusions about the impact of the current enemy offensive on the government's position in the populated areas. Details are still lacking on the rapidly changing situation in a number of provinces.

2. South Vietnamese forces in some areas have been reacting to the current enemy offensive in the same way they did in 1968, pulling back into static defensive positions. In general, while damage and disruption to the government's security and political apparatus so far is serious, it appears far less severe than that suffered by Saigon's forces in the first weeks of the 1968 Tet Offensive. How the situation develops from here on depends on a whole complex of factors: how the big-unit battles turn out in the more remote border regions, how well government territorial forces stand up under pressure from small Viet Cong and

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North Vietnamese units, and how effectively both sides assert political leadership in areas where they have or achieve military predominance.

3. The present Communist offensive has thus far caused less damage to the government's hold over the population than the 1968 drive, in large part because invading North Vietnamese regulars have replaced local Viet Cong forces as the enemy's main striking force. Moreover, many of the northern units have staged their assaults in the border regions, well away from population concentrations. In four major areas, however, the Communists have caused significant damage to pacification in the last three weeks: in Quang Tri Province, along the coast from Quang Nam to Binh Dinh provinces, in Binh Long Province north of Saigon, and in Chuong Thien Province in the Mekong Delta. In three of these areas--Quang Tri, Binh Long, and Chuong Thien--the damage appears to have been the work of main-force units, largely made up of North Vietnamese troops, which attacked from across the DMZ, from Cambodia, and from the remote U Minh Forest in the delta. Along the coast, local Viet Cong units, reinforced by northerners, were the aggressors.

The Northern and Central Provinces

4. In Quang Tri, the North Vietnamese have seized half of the province and are claiming to have set up "liberation governments." Most of the people who lived just below the DMZ appear to have fled south, however, and the enemy controls largely a battlefield that is subject to heavy allied bombing and shelling. Some 150,000 residents of Quang Tri are refugees; many have moved as far south as Hue, where they are living in temporary camps.

5. In terms of population control, the Communists probably take greater satisfaction from what their forces have done in the stretch of coastal lowlands from Quang Nam to Binh Dinh. Sympathy for the enemy has historically been strong in that region, and Viet Cong influence has been

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harder to uproot there than anywhere else in South Vietnam. Enemy attacks in this area have been heavy. The Communists have shelled and carried out small ground probes against nearly every principal town in the region, have overrun at least one district capital in Binh Dinh, and have surrounded several others farther north. The main north-south highway, Route 1, has been cut in many places, and government territorial forces have been hit hard in a number of clashes. Several hundred South Vietnamese regulars were sent into disorganized retreat when their base near a district town in northern Binh Dinh came under attack. In Quang Ngai Province, a number of South Vietnamese regular battalions were pulled out of the province and sent to fight farther north, and a Viet Cong main-force battalion has been moving from one government resettlement center to the next along the coast, burning them to the ground. There are some 45,000 new refugees in Quang Ngai and at least several thousand more in the provinces immediately north and south. The Communists are trying hard to take advantage of the disruption to recruit new forces, gather supplies, and establish political control mechanisms. Government forces are counter-attacking at several points, but the Communists clearly have the initiative.

6. These developments in the coastal provinces illustrate how Communist main- and local-force units support one another. The thrusts by northern regulars across the DMZ and into the central highlands have drawn South Vietnamese regulars from the coastal districts into these relatively remote battlefields. From Quang Ngai Province alone, four out of seven South Vietnamese Army battalions and three out of five Ranger battalions have been pulled out to fight in the north, leaving government territorials pretty much on their own in many populated districts. A similar situation exists farther south, where many South Vietnamese regular forces have been drawn into battle with invading northerners, weakening the defenses of many districts near Saigon and in the Mekong Delta.

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North of Saigon

7. The North Vietnamese have seized control of the northern part of Binh Long Province and have turned the rest into an active war zone. As in Quang Tri, much of the population from the occupied districts appears to have fled southward. Some people were trapped in the enemy-occupied northern district,

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8.

Farther south in Military Region 3, main-force Communist troops have recently begun to strike hard into northern Binh Duong Province, bringing heavy pressure against several towns and bases. Meanwhile, local Viet Cong cadre and units have been given urgent instructions to step up harassing actions in the more

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heavily populated provinces closer to Saigon in coordination with enemy big-unit attacks along the border. Small groups of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces have been marauding through some of these provinces in recent days. The pressure has had an appreciable psychological impact; villagers are more apprehensive about what lies ahead.

9. Recent events in Long Khanh Province north east of the capital are probably typical. Communist units there have taken advantage of the shift of South Vietnamese regulars to the threatened border provinces by shelling and harassing government outposts and spreading propaganda among the villages. In one village, the people were forced to turn out for a celebration of North Vietnamese "victories" in Quang Tri Province; in another, they were forced to listen to lectures warning that Communist units supported by tanks would soon be marching on their province and into Saigon itself. The people in these villages are said to have been frightened by these actions, especially in view of the inability of local territorial forces to prevent them.

Worry in the Delta

10. In a short time, the Mekong Delta has changed from the most secure and prosperous part of the country to a source of considerable apprehension to South Vietnamese commanders. The main threat to pacification in the delta is not resurgent Viet Cong forces, although they have sharply stepped up harassing attacks in many districts, but rather North Vietnamese main-force reinforcements which have recently moved into the delta region in strength. The balance of opposing regular forces in the delta has shifted significantly in recent weeks as a result of the infiltration of two North Vietnamese regiments from Cambodia into the upper delta, the movement of two more North Vietnamese regiments in Cambodia to positions just west of Chau Doc Province, and the departure of the South Vietnamese 21st Division to fight north of Saigon. Formerly, there were only six main-force enemy regiments fighting

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in the delta; now there are ten which pose an immediate threat to the region. So far, Communist gains have been largely limited to peripheral areas. Ranking South Vietnamese officials insist that they will be able to prevent any serious deterioration, but no one is claiming that the job will be easy, especially now that government forces in the area have been reduced.

11. South Vietnamese commanders in the delta are particularly concerned about the situation in Chuong Thien and the problem of dealing with the new North Vietnamese regiments. The enemy forces that have caused the most direct and serious damage to government population control in the delta, as indicated earlier, are the two Viet Cong regiments, heavily reinforced with northern troops, that have moved out of the U Minh Forest into Chuong Thien Province, overrunning outposts and generally overwhelming local government forces. Even before the current offensive, Chuong Thien was one of the least secure provinces in the country. Now, the reports say, the Communists are extending their influence northward out of Chuong Thien into Phong Dinh Province, where they could threaten the regional capital of Can Tho.

12. The two northern regiments that have been infiltrating the upper delta have also caused significant damage, overrunning government outposts and attacking settlements along the Kien Tuong - Kien Phong border. So far these units have been operating in a sparsely populated region, but South Vietnamese commanders in the delta are concerned that they will continue south into Dinh Tuong, one of the most heavily populated and richest provinces in the delta. The South Vietnamese are moving regular units to head off this threat before the North Vietnamese can get into position to support local Viet Cong attacks in Dinh Tuong.

13. The two northern regiments that have moved opposite Chau Doc Province in the extreme

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southeast of Cambodia have had a direct effect on the situation in the delta, even though they still are outside the borders of South Vietnam. Anticipating that these units would push on into the delta, the South Vietnamese have sent into Cambodia nearly all of the regular forces they normally assign to border defense--a division of Rangers heavily reinforced with tank units. These forces have been involved in heavy fighting with the North Vietnamese in recent weeks. The South Vietnamese have prevented the North Vietnamese from pushing across into Chau Doc, but have taken serious losses themselves, and they have been unable to prevent the other northern regiments from slipping into the delta farther east.

14. In the other parts of the delta, Communist forces have been carrying out widespread harassing attacks. A number of outposts along the southern edges of the U Minh forest in An Xuyen Province and at scattered locations elsewhere have fallen under enemy control and there are persistent reports [REDACTED] indicating that the Communists are planning a major assault against the capital of Kien Hoa Province. Since the night of 7-8 April, however, when the number of attacks shot up dramatically, the level of Communist activity has leveled off considerably.

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15. Government security forces and officials in many populated districts have been hit, but in most districts they are still intact, and there does not appear to have been any general abandonment of the countryside. Indeed, in many delta provinces, local security forces are operating aggressively. Some of the regional force units there are being regrouped into larger units to cope with the growing Communist main-force threat; others are containing the enemy's local forces fairly effectively. The pattern of activity suggests that the native Viet Cong in the delta, while still dangerous, are a much less formidable threat to the government than they were in 1968. As in most other parts of the country, the outcome of the battles between the main-force units of both sides will play a major role in determining who controls the delta.

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